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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the influence of Community Leadership: A County Perspective--(CLCP), a 12-week Georgia program to help build and maintain a solid leadership base in a community, on participants' organizational participation, political activity, leadership and problem-solving skills, further involvement in community issues, and decision making. A pretest-posttest only design was used to analyze information obtained from 434 individuals in 13 county CLCP programs, with an approximately 65 percent response rate. Six months after the end of the program, open-ended telephone interviews were conducted to identify community leadership activities in which participants were involved. The study was concerned with changes in participants' activity and skill level. Some of the results of the study were the following: (1) no differences were found between the pretest and posttest on organizational participation--in contrast to earlier studies that had found an increase in such participation; (2) significant differences were found between pretest and posttest on four of the nine leadership and problem-solving variables--ability to motivate people, knowledge of resources for solving public problems, ability to lead a group, and ability to deal effectively with local political leaders; (3) significant relationships were found between several leadership and problem-solving variables and organizational participation. The study concluded that the leadership program has helped to develop leadership skill levels and enhance participation in public policy. (Contains 10 references.) (KC)

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# COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION, POLITICAL ACTIVITY, LEADERSHIP AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership development programs that help ensure an adequate supply of effective leaders are an important and continuing need in community development (Fear et al., 1985). These leaders provide the basis for improving the quality of life in communities (Fear et al., 1985). The Cooperative Extension Service (CES) plays a significant educational role in helping community organizations and their leaders, potential leaders and local lay people accomplish their important work. The Extension System is frequently called on to help leaders form new organizations and involve and train local citizens to solve emerging problems. Recently, the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service has spearheaded efforts to train local community leaders and lay citizens to address critical issues facing their communities and the state. This educational effort was a community leadership program. This paper presents the findings of a study to assess the organizational participation, political activity, leadership and problem solving skills of participants in the community leadership program.

### Community Leadership Program

The Cooperative Extension Leadership Program in Georgia is called "Community Leadership: A County Perspective" (CLCP), and is designed to develop and stimulate citizen participation in leadership roles. Specific objectives of the program include developing basic leadership skills, working with other local leaders, understanding local governmental functions, and identifying major issues and concerns impacting local communities (Cooper, 1985).

The CLCP program is a twelve week program to help build and maintain a solid leadership base in a community. The program is offered to communities which exhibit signs of readiness for leadership development. The 12 class sessions are divided into three units with each unit building on the

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other. The first unit, taught in class sessions 1-3, covers an individual perspective of basic leadership. This first unit includes classes on individual values as well as an overview of leadership. Unit two is presented in classes 4-7 with subjects relating to participatory or group leadership roles. Topics include group formation, motivation, group maintenance, management and problem solving skills. The third unit, Applied Leadership: A Community Perspective, is presented in classes 8-12. These classes cover the community development process along with a study of the community to assess problems or needs in the participant's community. During these sessions, socio-economic data of each community are discussed. Program participants also form special issue task forces and have opportunities to visit with state and local legislators as part of this unit. In addition to the 12 weeks of class sessions most community leadership programs have an opening ceremony and a graduation ceremony to recognize the participants (Rohs, 1990, p.2). The program is taught by university Extension faculty from the Leadership and Economic Development Department and totals 72 hours over a 12-week period.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study investigated the influence of the Community Leadership Program (CLCP) on participants' organizational participation, political activity, leadership and problem solving skills. In addition participants' further involvement in community issues and decision making was assessed.

The number of leadership development programs have proliferated in the last decade. Emerging leaders are being identified and becoming more involved in community affairs through leadership programs in more than 250 cities and towns across America (Moore, 1986). Many programs are university based and provide leadership training on a statewide or regional basis (Freeman, Gregory and Clark, 1986). Internal evaluations of four statewide leadership development programs indicate that intensive training programs improve the quantity and quality of participation of individuals who receive such training (Howell, Weir and Cook, 1982). Specifically, individuals increased their leadership and problem solving skills and increased their participation in government and voluntary public service organizations (Howell et al., 1982). Similar results were expected in the CLCP program.

## METHODOLOGY

In determining the participation levels and the factors that may effect participation, a pretest-posttest only design was used to analyze information obtained from

participants in the CLCP program. Although this design does not use a comparison group and limits the internal validity of the study, the design does provide a comparison between performances by the same group of participants before and after the program. It was expected that the findings from this study would be similar to other leadership studies.

Study Population

The data for this study were obtained from participants enrolled in the Extension Community Leadership Programs in Georgia. The participants in the leadership group were identified by an adivsory committee made up of county extension staff and representatives of the local Chamber of Commerce and other city, county and business organizations. Selection was made on the basis of leadership position and community involvement as well as the perceived potential for leadership. Nominees were then asked to submit an application to participate in the Community Leadership Program. Thirteen rural counties from all geographic locations throughout the state requested the Community Leadership program in 1988. A total of 434 individuals participated in the Leadership Program in these thirteen counties and comprised the sample for this study.

Instrumentation

This study was concerned with changes in participants' activity and skill levels. A paper/pencil instrument was used to gather information on leadership and involvement, including participants' self-assessment of political activity, leadership and problem solving skills and participation in community organizations. Information relating to participants' political activity and organizational participation were obtained straightforward from the instrument administered. Information relating to leadership and problem solving skills was obtained from participant reactions to nine statements on a 5-point scale ranging from very good to very poor. These statements were adapted from previous leadership studies in Pennsylvania and Florida.

Definition of Variables

The measures used to define each variable are described below:

- Organizational participation was defined by the following measures: Total number of organizations a person belonged to, meetings per year, and the number of meetings attended.
- Political activity and involvement were measured by voting frequency, number of contacts with political officials, and other political involvement (i.e., working on campaigns and attending political speeches).

• Leadership and problem solving skills were measured by participant self-assessment of skills, abilities, and knowledge of working with groups and individuals. Nine items comprised this portion of the instrument.

Data Collection and Comparative Analysis

The instrument was administered to the CLCP participants during the first and last class sessions. To increase the rate of response follow-up procedures were administered to the non-respondents. Class session reminders and additional pretest instruments were distributed to pretest non-respondents while instruments were mailed to posttest non-respondents. Of the 434 participants enrolled in the program, a total of 283 pretests and 270 posttests were returned yielding 65 percent and 62 percent response rates respectively.

Six months after the end of the program, open-ended telephone interviews were conducted to identify community leadership activities participants were involved in.

Descriptive statistics of central tendency and variability were computed to summarize the data regarding participation and demographic characteristics. The T-test for non-independent groups was used to test for significant differences in political activity, leadership and problem solving and participation levels. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients were used to test for the relationship between variables.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Differences in Pretest and Posttest

Table 1 reports the differences in organizational participation, political activity, leadership and problem solving skills before and after the Community Leadership program. No statistically significant differences were found between the pre and posttest on organizational participation. This is not consistent with previous studies. Cadwalader (1988) reported an increased participation in an evaluation of the Family Community Leadership program in Oklahoma. However, an evaluation of the Public Affairs Leadership program by Martin (1977) at Pennsylvania State University showed only one group out of three had an increase in membership in voluntary organizations. In yet another study, participation levels increased. Kimball, Andrews, and Quinoz (1987) evaluated the Michigan Expanding Horizons Leadership Development Program and found that participants became more involved in community organizations as a result of the Leadership Development Program.

Significant differences were found between pretest and posttest ratings on four of the nine leadership and problem solving variables (Table 1). These variables were: (1) ability to motivate and inspire people; (2) knowledge of resources to use in solving public problems; (3) ability to lead a group, and (4) ability to deal effectively with local political leaders. These findings are consistent with a study done by Heasley (1984), who found an increased knowledge of resources as one of the benefits of a New England multi-state leadership program. Similar results were found by Cadwalader (1988) in an evaluation of the Family Community Leadership (FCL) Program. Respondents to the FCL survey indicated a greater confidence in themselves, including the ability to motivate others.

Significant relationships were found between several leadership and problem solving variables and organizational participation (Table 2). Specifically, the higher participants rated themselves on the variables "Confidence to Promote Causes" and "Knowledge of Resources", the more organizations they belonged to. Also, the higher participants rated themselves on their "Ability to Work with Other People", the more meetings they attended. Likewise, participants felt that the more meetings which organizations held per year, the higher they rated their ability to deal with local leaders. These findings are important from the standpoint of increased participation in community affairs and decision-making. Participation requires that persons have the knowledge and skills necessary to perform effectively. Community Leadership programs can offer individuals the opportunity to prepare for effective participation.

Significant relationships also existed between the leadership and problem solving variables and participants' political activity (Table 3). All four leadership and problem solving variables having significant differences between pre and posttest ratings were associated with political activity. The higher the participants' ability to motivate and inspire people, the more likely they were to have worked for a political candidate. The better their knowledge of resources to use in solving public problems, the more local contacts they had made with officials, and the more likely they were to have worked for a political candidate. Participants who rated themselves higher on the ability to lead a group also had higher voter rates, more contacts with state level officials, were more likely to work for a political candidate than those participants who rated their ability to lead a group at lower levels. Likewise, participants who rated their ability to deal with local leaders at higher levels were more likely to have written public officials, worked for a political candidate and had a larger number of contacts with local officials than those with lower ability ratings. The remaining

leadership and problem solving variables were also related to varying degrees to measures of political activity among the leadership program participants.

Table 1
Test of Significance for Organizational Participation, Political Activity and Leadership and Problem Solving Skills Variables Between Pretest and Posttest

| Variables | Pretest N | Pretest Mean | Pretest STD | Posttest N | Posttest Mean | Posttest STD | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organizational Participation | | | | | | | | |
| Total Organizations | 248 | 3.93 | 4.09 | 238 | 3.98 | 5.23 | - 0112 | .910 |
| Meetings/Yr. | 238 | 46.55 | 17.81 | 229 | 46.30 | 27.79 | .098 | .923 |
| Meetings Attended | 235 | 38.69 | 26.02 | 223 | 38.90 | 26.59 | .086 | .930 |
| Political Activity | | | | | | | | |
| Wrote Officials[1] | 280 | 1.30 | 0.546 | 263 | 1.27 | .608 | .525 | 0.59 |
| Contacted Local[2] | 191 | 1.50 | 0.750 | 206 | 1.48 | .737 | .229 | 0.81 |
| Contacted State[2] | 170 | 1.26 | 0.560 | 169 | 1.27 | .565 | .219 | 0.82 |
| Contacted National[2] | 133 | 1.19 | 0.490 | 120 | 1.17 | .440 | .213 | 0.83 |
| Political Candidate[1] | 277 | 1.53 | 0.510 | 263 | 1.51 | .500 | .567 | 0.57 |
| Political Work[1] | 120 | 1.10 | 0.320 | 118 | 1.11 | .034 | -0.233 | 0.81 |
| Voter Rate[3] | 282 | 1.31 | 0.730 | 268 | 1.24 | .630 | 1.123 | 0.26 |
| Leadership and Problem Solving Skills[4] | | | | | | | | |
| Confidence | 238 | 1.76 | 0.633 | 269 | 1.74 | 0.66 | 0.490 | 0.62 |
| Motivate | 283 | 2.20 | 0.656 | 269 | 2.08 | 0.66 | 2.067 | 0.04* |
| Knowledge | 282 | 2.49 | 0.920 | 269 | 2.35 | 0.75 | 1.943 | 0.05* |
| Influence | 282 | 2.41 | 0.820 | 269 | 2.31 | 0.75 | 1.530 | 0.12 |
| Work People | 283 | 1.54 | 0.690 | 269 | 1.60 | 0.65 | 0.590 | 0.56 |
| Decisions | 283 | 2.04 | 0.790 | 269 | 1.96 | 0.78 | 1.240 | 0.23 |
| Lead | 282 | 2.21 | 0.740 | 269 | 2.10 | 0.72 | 1.800 | 0.07** |
| State Legislative | 283 | 2.61 | 0.880 | 269 | 2.55 | 0.86 | 0.770 | 0.44 |
| Deal Local | 281 | 2.45 | 0.960 | 269 | 2.30 | 0.89 | 1.850 | 0.06** |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .10$
[1] = Yes, [2] = No

[2] Number times contacted officials 1 = 1-5, 2 = 6-10, 3 = 11+

[3] 1 = Always (100-90%) 2 = Almost Always (89-75%) 3 = Usually (74-50%) 4 = Seldom (49-25%) 5 = Rarely (less than 25%) 6 = Never

[4] 1 = Very Good, 2 = Good, 3 = Fair, 4 = Poor, 5 = Very Poor

Table 2
Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients for Relationships Between Posttest Organizational Participation and Leadership and Problem Solving Variables

| | Organizational Participation | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Total Organizations | Meetings Per Year | Meetings Attended |
| Confidence to Promote Causes | .15* (N=237) | .01 (N=227) | .08 (N=197) |
| Ability to Motivate & Inspire People | .08 (N=351) | .01 (N=336) | .05 (N=330) |
| Knowledge of Resources | .12* (N=237) | .01 (N=227) | .09 (N=197) |
| Ability to Make Informed Decisions | .08 (N=237) | .03 (N=237) | .03 (N=197) |
| Ability to Influence Community Affairs | .10 (N=237) | .02 (N=227) | .02 (N=197) |
| Ability to Work With Other People | .10 (N=237) | .07 (N=227) | .20* (N=197) |
| Ability to Lead | .07 (N=237) | .08 (N=227) | .10 (N=197) |
| Knowledge of State Legislative Processes | .10 (N=237) | .02 (N=227) | .01 (N=197) |
| Ability to Deal with Local Leaders | .10 (N=237) | .14* (N=227) | .05 (N=197) |

*p <.05 5=Very Good; 4=Good; 3=Fair; 2=Poor; 1=Very Poor

Although the number of significant differences between pretest and posttest ratings was not so numerous as expected, differences in the leadership and problem solving area are noteworthy. This may be a major step toward increasing a person's involvement in community development activities and having a voice in community affairs. This is particularly true of the four variables "ability to motivate people", "knowledge of resources to use in problem solving", "ability to lead a group" and "ability to deal effectively with local political leaders". These variables are related to organizational participation levels and political

## Table 3
## Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients for Relationships Between Posttest Political Activity, Leadership and Problem Solving Variables

| Variables | Political Activity: Wrote Public Officials[1] | Work Level[4] | Voted Rate[3] | Worked for Candidates[1] | Number of Contacts[2]: Local | State | National | Attended Political Speech[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leadership and Problem Solving Skills[5] | | | | | | | | |
| Confidence to Promote Causes | .05 (N=263) | .05 (N=118) | .13* (N=268) | .16* (N=263) | .10 (N=206) | .10 (N=169) | .01 (N=120) | .26* (N=53) |
| Ability to Motivate & Inspire People | .02 (N=263) | .07 (N=118) | .07 (N=268) | .24* (N=263) | .03 (N=206) | .03 (N=169) | .05 (N=120) | .19 (N=53) |
| Knowledge of Resources | .06 (N-263) | .01 (N=118) | .01 (N=268) | .12* (N=263) | .20* (N=206) | .13* (N=169) | .06 (N=120) | .17 (N=53) |
| Ability to Make Informed Decisions | .11 (N=263) | .11 (N=118) | .03 (N=268) | .05 (N=263) | .18 (N=206) | .03 (N=169) | .13 (N=120) | .34* (N=53) |
| Ability to Influence Community Affairs | .05 (N=263) | .09 (N=118) | .04 (N=268) | .20* (N=263) | .11 (N=206) | .05 (N=169) | .08 (N=120) | .32* (N=53) |
| Ability to Work with Other People | .16* (N=263) | .08 (N=118) | .18* (N=268) | .15* (N=263) | .04 (N=206) | .04 (N=169) | .06 (N=120) | .04 (N=53) |
| Ability to Lead | .06 (N=263) | .03 (N=118) | .18* (N=268) | .20* (N=263) | .07 (N=206) | .19* (N=169) | .01 (N=120) | .20 (N=53) |
| Knowledge of State Legislative | .09 (N=263) | .02 (N=118) | .13* (N=268) | .19* (N=263) | .20* (N=206) | .28* (N=169) | .04 (N=120) | .04 (N=53) |
| Ability to Deal w/ Local Leaders | .25* (N=263) | .01 (N=118) | .11 (N=268) | .14* (N=263) | .31* (N=206) | .09 (N=169) | .08 (N=120) | -.01 (N=53) |

*p < .05

[1] 1 = Yes, 2 = No

[2] Number times contacted officials 1=1-5, 2=6-10, 3=11+

[3] 1 = Always (100-90%) 2 = Almost Always (89-75%) 3 = Usually (74-50%) 4 = Seldom (49-25%) 5 = Rarely (less than 25%) 6 = Never

[4] 1 = Local, 2 = State, 3 = National

[5] 5 = Very Good, 4 = Good, 3 = Fair, 2 = Poor, 1 = Very Poor

activity. The higher participants' leadership and problem solving skill ratings on these items, the more organizations they participated in and belonged to, and the more involved they became in a variety of political activities at the local and state levels and thus, the higher the participants' self-assessment the greater their involvement in community affairs.

A plausible explanation for the few changes in

pretest/posttest scores may be the amount of time that elapsed between the beginning and end of the Community Leadership program. Specifically within the 12-week focus of classes, participants may not have had the opportunity to implement their skills, take action or change their behavior in this short time period. Annual follow-up studies may reveal such changes.

Preliminary follow-up telephone interviews six months following the last Leadership class revealed that participants have become further involved in their community and better informed on local issues. Some on-going leadership activities and roles have included the formation of leadership alumni groups, visiting the State Capitol during legislative sessions, attending "issues breakfasts" with state legislators, adopting mission statements encouraging local officials to involve leadership class participants in providing education on critical issues, participating in the recruitment and hiring of a new city manager and for some participants, being elected as first-time candidates to various local offices.

## SUMMARY

Despite the limitations of the study design used positive changes have occurred in participants' leadership and problem solving skills. These changes were found to be further related to organizational and political involvement activities at the local level. As a person's leadership and problem solving skill increased, so did their organizational and political activity. Preliminary follow-up surveys have revealed several leadership accomplishments. The Community Leadership Program has served as a catalyst to develop and involve local citizens in improving their communities. Such programs play an important part in helping citizens improve their own self-image and skill level while at the same time enhance their participation in public policy.

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